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Using Personality Confidence to Enhance Behavioral Prediction: The Case of Self-Monitoring

A Senior Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements fro graduation with distinction in Psychology in the undergraduate colleges of the Ohio State University

by

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June 2006

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Abstract

Prior research on thought certainty has shown that thoughts held with greater certainty better predict judgments, and prior work on attitude certainty has shown that attitudes held with greater certainty are more strongly correlated with behavioral intentions than attitudes held with low certainty. The present research examines the effect of certainty on personality variables, specifically self-monitoring. One hundred and five undergraduate students designed their own advertisements for a consumer product and completed the self-monitoring scale and indicated their confidence in their responses to the scale. Replicating previous research, as self-monitoring increased so did the emphasis on image in the advertisements they created. Importantly, this pattern was stronger as confidence in one's self-monitoring responses increased.

Personality Confidence: Self-monitoring

In his speech at the United States Air Force Academy Graduation Ceremony in the spring of 2004, President Bush addressed the new graduates using their own slang and inside jokes:

> You've worked hard to get to this moment. You've survived "Beast," spent seven months eating your meals at attention, carried boulders from Cathedral rock, and endured countless hours in "Jack's Valley." In four years, you've been transformed from "basics" and "smacks" to proud officers and airmen, worthy of the degree and commission you receive. Congratulation on a great achievement (Bush, 2004, ¶ 2).

Other politicians use the slang or even the accent of the people that they are giving a speech to presumably in an attempt to appeal to the audience.

On the other hand, many politicians never sway from their adopted speech. During the 2004 presidential campaign, for example, Vice President Cheney gave the exact same opening in his speech at every rally, even lampooning candidate Kerry for "goose hunting in Ohio. I notice that the Senator brought a camouflage jacket for the occasion, which did make me wonder how regularly does he go hunting. My personal opinion is that his camouflage jacket is an October disguise. It's an effort he's making to hide the fact that he votes against gun owner rights at every turn. But, my fellow sportsmen, this cover-up isn't going to work, because you and I know the Second Amendment is more than just a photo opportunity." (2004, ¶ 3) Although Cheney was charging that Kerry was acting and dressing like the group he needed to impress (much as Bush does), in his consistency, Cheney's profile is different. Many other politicians act

like Cheney, who see no need to do anything more than slightly customize a speech for the group to which they are delivering it.

It is plausible that these two groups of politicians differ in self-monitoring. Self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974, 1979) is a personality variable having to do with impression management. Individuals differ in the extent to which they manage their social image and regulate their behavior to adapt to situational concerns, from high self-monitoring individuals who are more sensitive to situational cues and are concerned with their self-presentation, to low self-monitoring individuals who are sensitive to their own values and beliefs and are not concerned with self presentation (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000).

According to Gangestad and Snyder (2000), high self-monitors are generally more aware of the social circumstances in which they find themselves. These individuals deliberately regulate and adapt their behavior to situational and interpersonal cues provided by the social context. For example, high self-monitors would likely adjust how they behave in front of a coworker versus a boss; similarly, a politician might change his speech pattern to match the constituency to which he is giving a speech.

In contrast, it has been proposed that low self-monitors have much less sensitivity to social cues and situational attributes; moreover, they are less concerned with self-presentation. They do not monitor their behavior for the sake of desirable appearances, and are consequently more consistent from situation to situation. In general, low self-monitors behave in ways that reflect their own inner emotions, values, and beliefs (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Consequently, a low self-monitor would be more inclined to act similarly in the presence of a coworker and a boss. Similarly, a politician may

choose to give the same speech over again, with little regard to where he is and who is in the audience.

It follows then, that because they are very image-conscious, high self-monitors will value things that boost their social image. They are also more likely to focus on social aspects of products and people. Because they pay attention to their own ideas and not to social cues from others, low self-monitors will tend to not value things that boost image. Instead, they will prefer arguments that focus on the objective qualities of products and people. Past research (e.g., Snyder & Debono, 1985) has shown that an individual's level of self-monitoring can, in fact, predict the type of persuasive messages to which the person is most susceptible. High self-monitors prefer strong messages (advertisements, for example) that emphasize boosting image and appearance through use of the product. Arguments of this nature are called image-related messages. The performance and merits of the product are hardly mentioned; instead, the image connected with the use of the product becomes the focus of the message. Image-related advertisements and packages are visually striking, because to high self-monitors, the image and appearance of the product is often more important than the product itself (e.g., Debono, Leavitt, & Backus, 2003).

By contrast, it has been found that low self-monitors find strong messages more appealing when they describe the product features and tell how useful the product is. These arguments are known as quality-related messages. Function is more important than form in this case. The product, specifically the uses and quality, is emphasized. For low self-monitors, the most important factor in advertising is the value and quality of the product itself and the product's uses and feature, not the appearance and image of the

product (e.g., Debono, et. al., 2003). When a strong advertisement matches people's self-monitoring style they express a greater preference for and more positive behavioral intentions toward the product (Snyder & Debono, 1985).[1]

Shavitt (1989) has noted that just as some people prefer one type of argument over another, some types of products tend to be supported with one type of argument more than another by most people. Utilitarian (or quality) products are those that are used strictly or predominantly for a practical purpose (e.g., air conditioners, aspirin, or coffee). Social identity (or image) products are those that are largely used to promote a certain image (e.g., greeting cards, perfume, or wedding rings). Multiple use products have aspects of both utilitarian (quality) and social (image) products. That is, products like jeans, tennis shoes, sunglasses, and credit cards serve utilitarian purposes, while also being outlets for self-presentation. Because multiple use products serve both social and utilitarian functions, the type of argument used depends largely on the person, such as based on one's self-monitoring status. When a product has multiple functions (i.e., can serve both quality and image functions), high and low self-monitors will use different types of arguments when designing their own advertisements (Shavitt, Lowrey, & Han, 1992). That is, high self-monitors prefer to write advertisements that use social or image-related arguments, whereas low self-monitors use more utilitarian arguments (Shavitt, et. al., 1992).

One important question, given the impact of self-monitoring, centers on understanding for whom self-monitoring is most likely to influence action, or which high

[1] If the message is weak (poor quality or image), the reverse holds. That is, because low self monitors are more attentive to the quality of the product and high self-monitors are more sensitive to the image of the product, if the product performs poorly on these dimensions, low self-monitors will be less favorable toward a poor quality product than high self monitors and the reverse holds for a product with a poor image (Petty & Wegener, 1998).

self-monitors are more influenced by image-related messages and which low self-monitors are more influenced by quality-related messages? Recent advances in the domain of attitudes and persuasion on thought and attitude certainty can be adapted to suggest a moderator variable that can help predict for whom self-monitoring should be most likely to influence people's actions and decisions.

This moderating variable is certainty. Two kinds of certainty are relevant here – belief certainty and attitude certainty. First, considerable research under the *self-validation hypothesis* (Petty, Briñol, & Tormala, 2002) has shown that the degree of certainty people have in their underlying beliefs can influence reliance on those beliefs. Thus, research has shown that people who are confident in their positive or negative responses to a persuasive message use those beliefs more in forming their overall attitudes (e.g., Briñol, Petty, & Tormala, 2004; Tormala, Petty, & Briñol, 2002). When people doubt their beliefs, they are less likely to use them to form an overall attitude. Thus, people who are confident in their responses to the self-monitoring scale items are expected to be more likely to use those beliefs to form an overall self-monitoring conceptualization (self-schema).

Second, research has shown that people who are more confident in the beliefs underlying a judgment are more confident in the overall judgment itself (e.g., Petty et al., 2002). Thus, people who are more confident in their responses to the self-monitoring scale should be more confident in their overall conceptualization of themselves. What are the consequences of having high versus low confidence in one's self-monitoring status? For this, we turn to research on attitude certainty.

Attitude certainty refers to how valid an individual feels a given attitude is (Gross, Holtz, & Miller 1995). Prior research has shown that attitudes held with certainty are more highly correlated with behavioral intentions and behavior than attitudes held with low certainty. Put simply, the more confidence individuals have in their attitudes, the more likely they are to act on them (Fazio & Zanna, 1978; Tormala & Petty, 2002; Rucker & Petty, 2004).

Attitudes and personality traits are similar in that, at the most basic level, they are both components of the self (Sherman & Fazio, 1983). Thus, we predict that, just as increases in the certainty associated with an attitude increases the likelihood of action based on that attitude, increases in certainty associated with personality traits, such as self-monitoring, will increase the influence of those personality characteristics on behavior. The goal of this project is to provide evidence that self-monitoring will be more likely to influence intentions when individuals' have a high degree of certainty associated with their reported level of self-monitoring.

To test this hypothesis, we will use a paradigm previously used by self-monitoring researchers (Shavitt, et. al., 1992), but will also include a measure of personality confidence. Participants will be asked to create their own advertisements and report on the extent to which these ads emphasize image or quality components of the product. We predicted that individuals who are confident in their self-monitoring status would show classic self-monitoring effects more than individuals who have doubt in their self-monitoring status. Thus, in our situation we expected that as confidence in self-monitoring increased, the self-monitoring variable would be better able to predict generation of image versus quality arguments. When self-monitoring confidence is high,

the relationship between self-monitoring and the emphasis on image versus quality should be strongest. On the other hand, among individuals low in self-monitoring confidence, this relationship should be reduced or absent.

To test these hypotheses, individuals were asked to generate advertisements for a mixed-use product. Then, they provided ratings of the image versus quality emphasis of the advertisements they created. Participants' ratings were submitted to a self-monitoring x self-monitoring confidence multiple regression analyses. Assuming a significant interaction emerges, it will then be decomposed one standard deviation above and below the mean of self-monitoring confidence. We anticipate the analyses to reveal a significant interaction of self-monitoring and self-monitoring confidence, such that when self-monitoring certainty is high, the relationship between self-monitoring and the image/quality emphasis of the advertisements should be strongest. However, such an effect is not predicted when confidence is low.

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 105 Ohio State University undergraduates, who were partially fulfilling their research requirement for an introductory psychology class.

The independent variables of interest are self-monitoring and self-monitoring confidence, both of which are measured through questionnaires. The dependent variable, argument preference, is measured by having participants design their own advertisements (Shavitt et al., 1992). The design of this study is self-monitoring x self-monitoring confidence factorial, with both measures assessed continuously.

Procedure

The study was conducted in a laboratory room containing 8 computers. Individuals participated in the study in groups of 4 to 8 seated at separate computer stations that precluded visual contact. The study took approximately ten minutes to complete and participants viewed the stimuli and filled out the questionnaire using computers. The study was administered using Media Lab software. Stimulus materials were presented as Power Point slides, and participants selected answers by typing in free-response boxes, or by clicking on the button corresponding to their answer.

Participants were told that the study involved responses to advertising. Following the procedure established by Shavitt et al. (1992), participants were told that they would be presented with a product and asked to write an advertisement for it. It was emphasized that their answers would be completely anonymous. After exposure to the product and writing the ad, participants rated their ads for image versus quality content. Then participants completed the 18-item self-monitoring scale (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). Following completion of this scale, participants were administered the confidence measure. Finally, participants were thanked for their participation, debriefed, and dismissed.

Independent Variables

Self-monitoring. The 18-item self-monitoring scale was used to determine which type of impression management strategy a person uses: high or low self-monitoring (Snyder & Gangestad, 1985). Participants were asked to answer true or false to statements like "I would probably make a good actor" (endorsement is indicative of high self-monitoring) or "I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people" (endorsement is

indicative of low self-monitoring). The scale was scored so that zero indicated a low self-monitoring response and 1 indicated a high self monitoring response. Thus, higher scores indicate higher self-monitoring. Internal consistency for this measure is (α) of .70. Scores on the measure ranged from 2 to 15.

Self-monitoring confidence. The self-monitoring confidence questionnaire was composed of three questions to assess confidence in the answers given by participants to the self-monitoring questionnaire. Participants were asked how confident they were in their responses, how certain they were that their answers accurately described them, and how confident they were that their answers were accurate. Responses were given on a five-point scale (1 = not at all certain/confident; 5 = extremely certain/confident).

Dependent Measure

To assess the extent to which individuals generated ads that were image versus quality oriented, they were asked to examine a product and write a message regarding it. The multiple use product selected for the ad-writing task was a tennis shoe. A picture of the shoe with the label "Sport brand athletic shoe" was presented to the participants in a Power Point slide with instructions for the task (see Appendix). Athletic shoes are one of the products identified as having multiple functions by Shavitt and colleagues (1992). Participants were informed that they could make any reasonable assumptions about the product and to write an ad that would attract them to buy the product. They were given four minutes to write the ad, after which they were asked to indicate the theme of their completed advertisement: from totally social (1) to totally utilitarian (7). Lower numbers on the scale are assumed to indicate a preference for the generation of image over quality information.

Results

Scores on the argument theme measure were submitted to a self-monitoring x self-monitoring confidence multiple regression analysis. We centered self-monitoring scores by subtracting the mean to aid in interpretation (Aiken & West, 1991). A significant interaction of self-monitoring and self-monitoring confidence emerged (B=.174, t(101)=1.995, p=.05). A decomposition one standard deviation above and below the mean of self-monitoring (Figure 1) showed a significant effect of self-monitoring among participants with high confidence (B=-.201, t(101)=-.343, p=.01), such that high confidence high self monitors were more likely to use social arguments (μ= 4.42) than high confidence low self-monitors (μ= 5.7), providing support for the hypothesis that the predictive power of self-monitoring would be stronger for high confidence individuals. Among participants with low confidence, there was no effect of self-monitoring (B=.046, *ns*), supporting the hypothesis that there would be a reduced effect for these low confidence participants. No significant main effects of either confidence or self-monitoring were found.

Discussion

Results from this study supported our primary hypothesis. That is, as confidence in self-monitoring scale responses increased, so too did the relationship between self-monitoring and a known behavioral consequence of self-monitoring: the generation of advertisements that emphasize image (social factors) over quality (utilitarian factors). For individuals high in self-monitoring confidence, self-monitoring was able to predict which type of arguments were used in the advertisement, but for individuals with low self-monitoring confidence, self-monitoring had no predictive power. In other words,

participants with high scores in self-monitoring confidence and scores indicating high self-monitoring wrote ads that were relatively more social and image-related (and relatively less quality related), than those high in self-monitoring confidence and low in self-monitoring. In contrast, for individuals low in self-monitoring confidence, the self-monitoring scale could not predict the type of argument generated.

It is also important to mention that these results emerged on self-ratings. Our participants did not have perfect insight into their own behavior. We also cannot be sure what criteria they used to assess their placement along the social-utilitarian continuum. Further, coding by an objective rater yielded no effect of self-monitoring on the content of the advertisements themselves regardless of self-monitoring confidence levels, although the subjective self-ratings did yield an effect of self-monitoring in high confidence individuals. It may be that participants wrote advertisements that contained both image- and quality- related arguments (as most do), but individuals high in self-monitoring confidence merely perceived the arguments they wrote were more utilitarian or social in nature than our rater found them. They could have also used different criteria in making their judgment. Alternatively, perhaps high and low self-monitors wrote similar numbers of image and quality arguments, but those high in self-monitoring confidence weighted different arguments in making their overall ratings leading to the effects we observed.

Another issue that could be addressed in future research is the fact that the current study measured self-monitoring and self-monitoring confidence after people had generated their messages. Thus, it could be that generating image arguments leads people to be confident in their high self monitoring status and generating utilitarian

arguments leads people to be confident in their low self-monitoring status. Future research should measure self-monitoring and confidence prior to the task and separated in time from it.

Nevertheless, with these qualifications in mind, the current results provide some initial support for the key hypothesis, though additional research is needed to accept this conclusion more definitively. In addition to the caveats above, conclusions made from this study might be strengthened by replicating this finding with other multiple use products, to verify that self-monitoring certainty is an important variable in predicting behavior from self-monitoring scores. In addition, further research with other self-monitoring paradigms would be beneficial. Extending this research to other personality variables will also support the adoption of the three-item certainty questionnaire used in this study to other personality measures.

It may also be useful to examine the difference between global certainty and trait-related certainty. That is, are people certain in their answers to specific personality scales, or are we actually measuring overall certainty (e.g., self-esteem)? In another related study, DeMarree, Rucker, Petty, and Shoots-Reinhard (2006), measured Need to Evaluate (NE, Jarvis & Petty, 1996), liberalism-collectivism, and the certainty participants had in their answers to the NE and liberalism-collectivism scale. We found that NE and liberalism-collectivism only had a significant effect among participants that were high in confidence, but not for those low in confidence. Furthermore, the pattern for each variable was observed when controlling for the other (i.e., when we controlled for NE and NE confidence, we still found that liberalism-collectivism only had an effect on those participants with high liberalism-collectivism confidence). This suggests that we are

measuring trait-specific certainty, rather than a tendency to be certain in all answers given on individual difference scales.

The current research also suggests that concepts from the attitudes literature, such as belief and attitude certainty, can be useful in the personality domain. Other moderators of the attitude-behavior relationship might also help to increase the predictive validity of personality variables. For example, personality traits that are highly accessible to people (either because they already are part of a self schema or because of media attention, like in the case of extroversion/introversion), might also have a greater effect on subsequent behavior.

In conclusion, this experiment suggests a simple technique for increasing the predictive validity of a personality measure. By simply administering the three-item personality certainty questionnaire, experimenters and clinicians may be better able to predict the effect that personality traits will have on behavior. Specifically, personality traits held with greater certainty will have a greater effect on personality.

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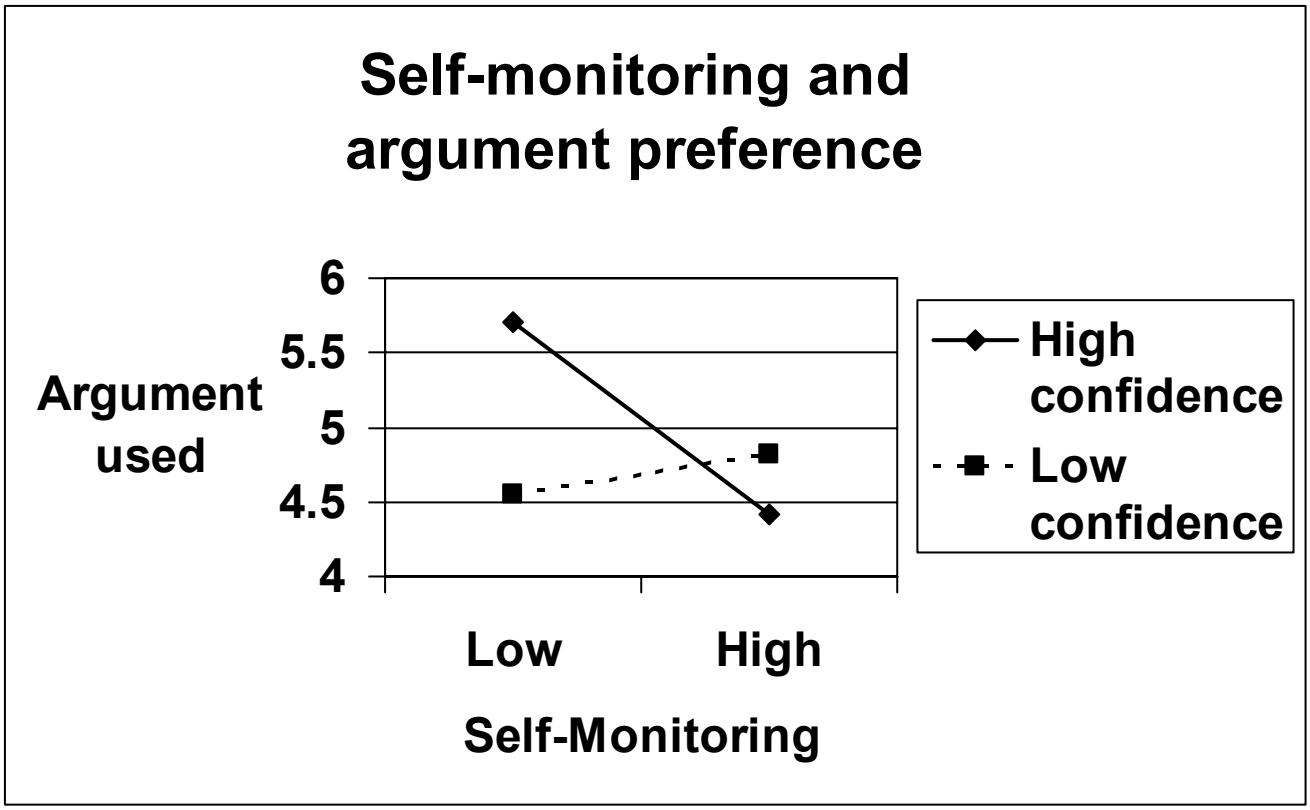
Figure Caption

Figure 1. Decomposed regression analysis of interaction of confidence and self-monitoring. Use of image or quality ads based on self report of ad on scale of 1 (totally social) to 7 (totally utilitarian) as a function of two levels of self-monitoring confidence (high or low). The self-monitoring groups were divided into high and low self-monitoring at 1 SD above and below the mean.


Self-monitoring and argument preference
Argument used
6
5.5
5
4.5
4
Low
High
Self-Monitoring
High confidence
Low confidence

Appendix

Sport brand athletic shoe

On the following screen, we ask that you write a very brief ad that would appeal to *you* personally for the new Sport Brand athletic shoe. We assume that you are unfamiliar with this product, so for the purpose of writing the ad, you may make whatever assumptions you want about the brand and make any statements that seem reasonable. What would an ad say that would attract *you* to buy this product?